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ABSTRACT

A search for a profile of the educator in correctional settings, for purposes of training, management, or definition of responsibilities yields very little information. Socially isolated individuals (prisoners) may perceive teachers in many different roles. Observing the interactions of prisoners and educators in adult detention facilities can provide information about the role, the responsibilities, and the desired personality traits of the correctional educator. Such observations have shown that a majority of socially isolated persons perceive educators as socratic types who are up on a pedestal. Others perceive them as custodians, radical-peers, paternalistic friends, guidance counselors, or as filling the father-brother role, usually the most successful teaching role in a penal setting. These educator types point out the multiplicity of roles and functions required of correctional educators. Some perform all of these roles, others rarely change roles and are unable to empathize with the problems and needs of institutionalized students. Socially isolated adults learn better and faster when they can perceive their teachers not only as teachers (socratic), but as father, brother, guide, counselor, friend, role model, and confidant. (PAS)

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OF THE EDUCATOR OF SOCIALLY ISOLATED PERSONS

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MULTIPLE ROLE'S RECOGNITION
OF THE EDUCATOR OF SOCIALLY ISOLATED PERSONS

This is a research into the ways in which adult detained persons (socially isolated individuals) may perceive the role of teachers in Correctional settings. These atypical roles are briefly described and some suggestions are inferred for an outline of the Correctional Educator's profile.

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When searching for the profile of the educator in Correctional settings for purposes of training, management and definition of responsibilities, one will find very little information. What is a Correctional Educator? What are his responsibilities? How can one best prepare himself for such profession? What should his characteristics be? What personality traits should the educator have, when his duty is that of educating individuals in isolation from society?

Using the method of participatory observation, during the period of 18 months, we have observed a group of 6 educators in the performance of their duties in a penal setting, within a detention adult facility in an urban environment. This document is a summary of our

observations and opinions.

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A teacher is a teacher is a teacher, but the socially isolated individuals with whom he comes in contact may perceive him in many different roles.

A large majority of the socially isolated persons sees the educator as "the socratic-type-teacher" and related to him as such. When needed, they asked for short explanations, objectively and coldy, in great awe. The teacher stands on an ideal pedestal and is expected to know so much more than any other member of this isolated small society! He is also perceived as someone who has no interests in human affective life; his concerns are for the cognitive life of individuals, that is, for human beings with learning problems.

Most of the time, the "socratic-profile" is joined with the "custodial-profile" in the same educator. The teacher who wants to perform purely the role of teacher , in a socially isolated setting, becomes assimilated to the guard. The teacher is the guard at the gates of your mind! In these cases, teaching may become learning, but attitudes are hardly changed. The gates of mental and spiritual freedom are as closed like those of the physical reality. The perception or the reality of the teacher-guard roles alienates and discourages inmates from the real problems of changing not only the life of the mind but also that of the heart. The teacher-guard type is an excellent professional and wants his students to pass their tests and

be remembered as numbers in a list of graduated. The socratic and custodial like teachers are recognized as having a job, but not a vocation for it or a feeling of mission. They are often assimilated to "professional educators" whose goals are often declared:"I want them to learn!". However,they are unable to communicate with their students; their words and answers do not speak to the problems of socially isolated human beings! They teach or are perceived to be teaching without passion, without understanding of the problems of their students and of the specific special situation in which they are.

At times, for whatever reasons, educators of the socially isolated individuals are behaving or are perceived to behave like "radical-peers" or busybodies. This role is rightly contrasted to the "teacher-guard" one and can be described as the "teacher-inmate" profile combination. The inmates perceive the teacher as one of their own; teacher and students call each other by first name, talk of the most irrelevant things without ever realizing the waste of time, energy and reciprocal respectability. The teacher pro inmate type or "radical-peer" profile may be destructive of proper institutional life and at times even of the profession of correctional educator. These relationships based on this role's recognition, when nourished and encouraged, can subvert the whole structure of the educational planning, as well as of its rehabilitative powers.

Without becoming an impartial ally of the inmates, "the paternalistic friend"like teacher seems to be capable of performing the duties of his teaching assignments together with the role of mediator and advocate for

all other needs his isolated students may have. The role of the teacher is perceived by this group of socially isolated persons similar to that regularly performed by their Institutional Counselors; the only difference being that they spend much more time with the teacher than with the counselor. Both the teachers and the counselors are "placeboes givers" and are perceived under such light. Both teacher and counselor can make the life in jail bearable and even interesting or advantageous. The group of students allowed to relate to the educators in such role is limited; however, it seems to be large enough to make teaching in such situations, like jails and mental institutions, challenging and interesting. Indeed, these individuals compensate and reward their teachers with an evident effort to apply themselves to learn whatever their teacher would feel like, plan for and insist on.

The "guidance-counselor" like teacher profile appears whenever there is enough confidence between the educator and the inmate. This confidence is generated generally by a long period of acquaintance of the inmate with the staff members and when the pre-trial period is known to come soon to an end. These factors by creating some inner tensions and fears approach the students to their teachers, to whom they will confide more naturally than to the correctional counselors or even their legal counselors.

The recognition of the teacher as "father-brother" type profile, accordingly to the teacher's age, seems to be the most recognized success-

ful role of the educator of socially isolated persons. The educator is expected to help in the achievement of all social and academic skills; he should be able to be a model in his profession and as a citizen; he should be patient, understanding, ready to listen and honest enough to correct errors of judgement and maturity as well as those of logic. Generally, the students who have reached this type of perception of the role of the Correctional Educators, are model inmates: they are avid learners, conduct a model institutional life and promise successful reentry into society. Unfortunately, at times, they are too dependent on one teacher, whom they have taken as their own model to follow; their growth, however, is evident to all staff.

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No generalization is suggested on the basis of these empirical observations. They are intended only to point out the multiplicity of roles and functions that is actually required and demanded from correctional educators in the performance of their special duties serving socially isolated adults. Some educators seem to be able to perform all the roles here described; some others rarely change their style, their "persistent" role, they seem to be unable to become empathic with the problems and needs of their students. The most empathic teacher was also the one who could easily play the multiple roles demanded from him. He also appeared to try most successfully to change students's attitudes and social postures. As a rule of thumb, it may be said that the educator's capacity of performing many roles is directly proportional

to the effectiveness of his work. Adult socially isolated individuals seem to learn better and faster when their relationships with the educators are at many levels: first as teacher-student, perhaps, but also as father, brother, guide, counselor, friend, model, confidant. The socially isolated adult becomes wholly dependent on all these roles that consciously or unconsciously he assigns to the "respondent" educators. He depends on them for the different needs that he has in his controlled condition; he depends on them in order to model his new attitudes and the changes necessary for readmission and success into the "free" society. Of all the treatment staff within a correctional setting, the teachers seem to be perceived by the inmates as the only ones with "high" professional standing. Both the correctional counselor and the regular guard seem to them to perform roles that have no marketable parallels in the world of work, outside the jail.

There are no limits to learning. However, certain roles and relationships between educators and isolated individuals will create obstacles to learning processes and to the teaching profession itself. Different teachers have different styles and perform different roles. However, the way they perceive themselves is not always the same way they are perceived by their students. Educators in Correctional settings must often reexamine their relationships with their students and discuss this topic with their colleagues.

The goal of the education of socially isolated persons should be that of humanization of man. Correctional education should maintain

"humanity" within difficult social structures. Correctional Education is not a job, but a mission; not only a profession, but also a vocation: to serve fellowmen. Isolated individuals should not purely learn about things, but also shape and model their characters. Correctional Educators' effectiveness and competency should be maintained at all times in various social roles. The profiles above outlined should be compounded into one that is balanced and capable of describing what a Correctional Educator really is and does. He is an educator and he does perform the roles of teacher, father, brother, friend, guide, model, counselor to his students, who are socially isolated individuals, with all the needs a human being may have in conditions of separation, rejection and suspicion.

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